

Derek Wallbank, *MinnPost*

WASHINGTON - An all-out White House press and pressure blitz seems to have moved the needle on a tax-cut extension compromise in Congress as Tuesday's very frosty reception thawed a bit early Wednesday - and then got frosty again.

Vice President Joe Biden took the lead with members of Congress, telling Democrats Tuesday during a closed-door session in what lawmakers later described as "really blunt terms" that the White House negotiated the best deal that they could with Republican leaders.

"[Biden] was really well received," said Rep. Tim Walz, who said he's "probably leaning in support" of the deal but will need to see the final bill before fully committing. "It's too important in this fragile economy....We're here to govern and to make compromises, I see those as positive things."

"I think that he did a really good job," said Rep. Betty McCollum, who agreed with Biden that the White House had gotten its best deal possible - though she said that she continues to oppose the Bush-era tax cuts and will continue to oppose the measure.

No legislation has yet been drafted, and this will be a tough push to make sure it glides through the House and Senate by next week Friday, when Congress is scheduled to leave town for the year.

As for the press side, this was perhaps the biggest one-day media push the White House has embarked on, all in the name of trying to quash the emerging narrative that Democrats were solidly against the plan.

There they came in rapid fire, dozens of endorsements blasted one-by-one from the White House press room to the rapidly-filling inbox of every reporter in Washington from the coalition of the tax cut willing. The mayors of Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Charlotte (and a token Republican from Oklahoma City). The governors of Pennsylvania and Florida. Two random second-term congressmen from Michigan.

From Mayor Quimby to Jed Bartlett

Basically, anyone with a D next to their name who said something nice about President Obama's tax cut compromise with GOP leaders got their own White House press release. After the first dozen or so, the White House press corps got in on the action.

"BREAKING FROM WHITE HOUSE: Duluth area glass-blower Hubert T. Grimset backs Obama/GOP tax cut compromise," wrote Talking Points Memo's Brian Beutler. It was a joke - there is no Hubert T. Grimset in Duluth. (I checked.)

The Hill's Sam Youngman broke the news that Mayor McCheese of McDonald's Happy Meal fame was a supporter, and eventually White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs himself got in on it by joking that he had endorsements ready to roll from Mayor Quimby of "The Simpsons" and "The West Wing" TV show president Jed Bartlett.

Yet despite the real (and fictional) endorsements, many Democrats remain highly skeptical of the plan.

Late this morning, House Democrats voted to not bring up the compromise tax extension up for a vote.

In addition, Rep. Jim Oberstar appears to have joined Keith Ellison and Betty McCollum in opposing the deal. Oberstar co-signed a letter by Vermont's Peter Welch, Ellison and 51 other Democrats that called the deal irresponsible and unfair.

Sen. Al Franken, who earlier in the day told MPR that Obama "punted on third down or second down," said this was a "very tough decision to make."

On the one hand, he worried that a tax cut extension for "millionaires and billionaires" would "blow a hole in the budget," on the other he noted that extending unemployment benefits would benefit Minnesotans in need.

"I'm not terribly happy about this package but a compromise is a compromise and politics is the art of possibility," Franken said.

Rep. Collin Peterson missed the Biden briefing, but said he'll likely vote "yes" on the deal.

"There's a lot in there to complain about, but I don't think we have much choice," he said. "I don't think we should be raising taxes in the middle of this economic downturn."

What's in there to complain about?

"Well, the whole tax code is a mess," Peterson said. "They should have overhauled the whole damn thing. Hopefully out this we'll finally get to where we need to be and that is to get rid of the whole thing and simplify it."

Maybe next year.